EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Religion, the Russian Nation and the State: Domestic and International Dimensions: an Introduction

This is an introduction to a collection of papers presented at a workshop organised by Jerry Pankhurst and Alar Kilp at Tartu University, Estonia, on 6 and 7 June 2012. It proceeds in three parts.

In the first part we consider 1988 as the watershed when ‘Soviet’ religion–state relations were replaced by ‘post-Soviet’ ones. Building on the existing scholarship and the contributions to this issue, we argue that the religion–state relationship of the ‘post-Soviet’ period is more complex as a result of (1) major transformations in the political sphere, (2) shifts in the status of traditional religious institutions vis-à-vis the state, culture and society, (3) the emergence of new intersections of religious and secular interests, and (4) alterations in the means of mass communication and its outcomes in the realm of scholarly exchange of ideas and information.

In the second part we argue that the increasingly complex nature of religion–state relationships has resulted in a body of scholarship less prone to promoting agreement among experts because of the greater complexity of phenomena and variations in the type of intellectual approach one brings to issues. A new range of theoretical and conceptual approaches that either were not applied during the Soviet period or have been developed since the end of that period are now being utilised in this field.

In the third part we discuss developments in Russian religion and politics from three comparative angles: by comparing Russia with other Orthodox and non-Orthodox countries and societies of the postcommunist region of Europe; by comparing East-Central European countries with those of Western Europe; and by comparing Russia with the countries of the CIS.

The 1988 Watershed

In 1988, a major turn occurred in church–state relations in the Soviet Union: the last General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev met Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and all Russia, and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) was granted the status of a legitimate public institution (Marsh, 2005, p. 545), the policy of ‘state atheism’ reached its end (Bourdeaux, 2000, p. 9), and the advent of religious freedom was inaugurated with the festivities of the millennium of Russian Orthodoxy. By the end of 1988, Gorbachev had announced to the United Nations that there would be a large-scale withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe, thus letting the region’s communist leaders know that ‘Soviet tanks would no longer protect their rule’ (Linz and Stepan, 1996, p. 242). Hence it can be argued that mutual recognition of church and state (which in East Germany had taken place already in 1979 (White et al., 2000, p. 682) and was
followed by the public celebration of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth in 1983) took place in the Soviet Union in 1988.

By 2013 there has been a quarter century of ‘post-Soviet’ change. During this period, church–state relations have not developed in isolation from other spheres of social life, primarily the economic, political and communication spheres. In this period, the whole postcommunist region of Europe has witnessed the transition to neoliberal market economies, which has resulted in the emergence of ‘net losers and net winners’, but also in the establishment of new structures of socioeconomic stratification. Throughout the region, the institution of marriage has undergone a significant weakening and ‘low fertility has become the norm’ (Gerber, 2012, pp. 196–219). The national trajectories to democracy have been markedly varied in speed and degree of success (Rupnik, 1999), and recent economic stagnation has been accompanied by growing dissatisfaction with democracy, the rise of anticapitalist feelings and the equation of ‘the criticism of the market’ with ‘nostalgia for Communism’ (Krastev, 2010, p. 117).

How have the relationships between politics and religion developed in the context of the abovementioned political, ideological, social and economic transformations? The answer to this question has to recognise that to use ‘Soviet period’ and ‘1988’ as bases of comparison is as problematic as using ‘post-Soviet period’ and ‘2013’. It is highly likely that the dynamics of the latter period are easier to apprehend than transformations in the former, but phases of development and dynamic changes characterise religion–state relationships in both periods of time. For example, there was a significant ‘thaw’ in the Soviet Union after the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, which gave broader space for ‘freer intellectual expression’ (Pankhurst, 1984, p. 290). Similarly, the initial introduction of relatively liberal requirements for state recognition of religious associations after the collapse of communist regimes was later followed by ‘religious reestablishment’ in post-communist polities (Sarkissian, 2009).

Thus the comparative discussion of religion–state relationships during the ‘Soviet’ and ‘post-Soviet’ periods does not assume their historically and empirically static and fixed nature, but builds on characteristics that made them different in practice. During the Soviet period, limitations on religious rights joined problems in the realm of other fundamental human rights as an item of surveillance, worry and, where possible, pressure for change from the world community. Today, the politics of religion are very different from just a quarter of a century ago. They are more complex as a result of (1) major transformations in the political sphere, (2) shifts in the status of traditional religious institutions vis-à-vis the state, culture and society, (3) the emergence of new intersections of religious and secular interests and (4) alterations in the means of mass communication and their outcomes in the realm of scholarly exchange of ideas and information.

**Religion and Politics Are More Complex Today**

Let us take each of these points and elaborate on the substance. How are religion and politics today more complex?

**Major Transformations in the Sphere of ‘The Political’**

First, there have been major transformations in the sphere of ‘the political’. The obvious issues here are the split-up of the USSR into 15 separate states, and even some pseudo-states (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorny Karabakh, perhaps Chechnya) that have their own particularities. Each of these units has specifics of local traditions, law and administrative practice and other qualities that require differentiated analysis. (One could
argue that this need for analytical differentiation was present even in the USSR, but whether or not it was needed, it was not honoured by most external experts in their writing. The USSR was usually treated as a single unit.) Beyond the obvious state transformations, there are also new layers of international organisation that affect policy in various states. The push for democratisation coming from the OSCE and the Council of Europe, to which most of these states belong, is causing greater attention to issues of religious representation and equal privilege across the region. As some of these states have joined the European Union and NATO, new pressures for change in all areas of social concern have arisen, and new vectors of networking have influenced change in all spheres.

As regards religion itself, the increased freedom that the breakup of the USSR generally brought has meant the proliferation of religious groups and organisations on the local, regional, national and global levels. Understanding the dynamics on these many levels is itself challenging. In some cases, the monopolisation of authority by the Soviet state has been replaced by monopolistic aspirations by religious groups, sometimes putting into question whether one kind of unfreedom has been replaced by another. Varieties of Protestant Christian groups from Baptists to Pentecostals have complained about inequities in treatment, and more recent ‘new religious movements’ (NRMs) like the Unification Church or the Hindu Hare Krishnas have faced considerable difficulties in gaining legal recognition, the ability to obtain worship or administrative quarters and similar problems. Even when laws are clear about the legality of given actions, the local cultures of distrust of strangers and seeming cultural isolationism often take precedence. According to many accounts, local Russian Orthodox clergy or lay leaders have played a significant role in suppression of various NRMs. In this regard, aspects of the pre-Soviet Tsarist – and in societies that were incorporated into the USSR during the Second World War, the pre-Soviet interwar – situation may provide parallels more readily than comparisons with the USSR.

Shifts in the Status of Traditional Religious Institutions vis-à-vis the State, Culture and Society

Second, shifts in the status of traditional religious institutions vis-à-vis the state, culture and society have altered the politics of religion. During the last quarter century several controversial trends have occurred in tandem. Throughout the postcommunist region, confessionalisation of political culture has been paralleled by detraditionalisation and individualisation of the cultural religion, in this issue discussed particularly with the examples of Estonian Lutheranism and Russian Orthodoxy. Thus while the linkages between religious confession and the cultural identity of the political community strengthen, this does not mean that the linkages between the population and religious adherence, religious literacy and the like are on the increase. A second trend, which Stephen Prothero (2008) has nicely demonstrated as true even in the USA, is that the ‘religious literacy’ of the population is in decline. Prothero tested the basics of three kinds of religious knowledge: of the denomination one belongs to by religious identification; of the religion(s) existing in the local culture; and of world religions. He found all three declining. It is clear, then, that the problem of low religious literacy is not unique to our cases: even where there has not been a half century – or three quarters of a century – of desocialisation from religious tradition, the religious knowledge of the public has been going down. What is different in the cases of Russia/Eastern Europe and the USA and, we would guess, most other cases at present, is the increase in confessional attachment of the public and the conflation of the confessional attachments with national identity and patriotism: that is, what we have called here the confessionalisation of political culture.
The transition from communist regimes brought both good and bad news to traditional churches. They found themselves in a ‘less-regulated environment’ (Ramet, 1991, p. 247), which after the regulation and control of communist states was a great relief. Nonetheless, they did find out very soon that they could not take the status of monopoly representation of religion for granted. Thus traditional churches everywhere in the postcommunist region of Europe have attempted to achieve the cultural status of a national church, ‘have sought to foster links with post-communist political elites, reduce the influence (and sometimes the actions) of religious minorities, and promote the synonymy between religious and national identity’ (Knox, 2007, p. 79).

The Emergence of New Intersections of Religious and Secular Interests

Third, new intersections of religious and secular interests have emerged. As the various faiths have developed in the last 25 years, we are finding an astounding variety of interests that intersect with religious interests per se. For example, as major religious groups have gained back their prestige, they have also gained much real property, part of what was confiscated by the Soviet authorities being restituted. Possessing property, or opening up windows of opportunity to have it granted by the state, means that economic motives have become more and more central to the lives of the churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, and the state administrations, of course, are always interested in economic assets: taking some for themselves through taxes or graft or voluntary contributions to social welfare lightens the burden on the state.

Economic entanglements mean that disputes over policy and politics are sure to ensue. The control of the options for action of the religious bodies is very much in the hands of the state apparatus in one way or another. Religious organisations become lobbying groups or insiders sharing in the crony capitalism or the excessive profits of exploitative business enterprises. Patriarch Kirill of the ROC experienced controversies relating to his wealth when his staff tried to hide the fact that he owned an extremely expensive watch (Schwirtz, 2012) and when he was found to have owned a luxury apartment near the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow (Den’, 2012).

Furthermore, both the major religious organisations and the state learn that they depend upon each other to some degree for legitimation among the population. As Machiavelli understood,

A prince, therefore, must be very careful never to let anything slip from his lips which is not full of ... five qualities ...: he should appear, upon seeing and hearing him, to be all mercy, all faithfulness, all integrity, all kindness, all religion. And there is nothing more necessary than to seem to possess this last quality. (Machiavelli, 1998, p. 60)

There is nothing better for a politician than a religious quest, and the priest who identifies the godly way to politics is to be rewarded. Of course, all of this takes place against the backdrop of an institutional competition among the state, the church and economic spheres to shape the country’s agenda.

None of this was relevant for state socialist society. The Communist Party set the agenda and the state extracted its due more or less as it willed. There were some subtle limits on state power, but they paled in comparison with the opportunities for control. The religious organisations were nearly totally controlled and more or less out of commission as independent actors. While the Soviet-era analysts – the Sovietologists – saw nearly
everything in state and society and religion in Cold War terms, that degree of simplification of the world is not possible today.

The abovementioned transformations in the linkages between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ have inspired scholars to focus more on the ‘political’ aspects in the relationships between religion and state. As shown in most of the contributions to this collection, in studying the functions, influence and presence of churches in national politics, scholars need to take a close look at the related political aspects (actors, purposes, timings and contexts). The type and degree of religion that functions in political processes is dependent on the answers to such questions as: is the regime closed or open?; is the relationship between regime and opposition intense and antagonistic, or cooperative and consensual?; and, very importantly, one should take into account the internal logic and ‘rhythm’ of the political processes. As our studies of the ‘Pussy Riot’ case and of the use of religious services in electoral campaigns show, scholarship benefits if one also takes into account the internal logic and ‘rhythm’ of the electoral processes and does not interpret such events, which outside specific ‘political timing’ and ‘political context’ will lose their political utility and public meaning, without giving due attention to the political processes involved.

This perspective allows scholars to trace the role of religious institutions, hierarchies and symbols in raising electoral support for both incumbents and the opposition, and also to trace the subtle long-term construction of political loyalty and ‘enemies of the Church’. The article by Rachel Schroeder and Vyacheslav Karpov in this issue studies particularly the discursive construction of the ‘enemies of the Church’ around four events (two exhibits at the Sakharov Museum, the Pussy Riot affair, and the blogger Yefimov case). The authors trace the ways in which Orthodoxy as a religious form of collective representation has become a part of the new ‘root cultural paradigm’ that ‘redefines the role of Orthodoxy in the Russian state and Russian society and entails punitive measures against the perceived enemies of the ROC’. The public survey data that they present allow the authors to conclude that ‘there is considerable support among ordinary Russians for the harsh punitive approach of the ROC and the state to what is perceived as anti-Church and anti-Orthodox’. They theorise these developments by using an analytical typology of four phases, starting from the initial ‘breach’ of the existing normative system, followed by social ‘crises’ between bearers of different paradigms, and ending with either the ‘reintegration’ into society of those who initiated the breach or with the recognition of the ‘irreparable schism between the contesting parties’. The empirical processes traced by the authors end with the predominance of the paradigm which has roots in Russian history as far back as Uvarov’s famous triad ‘autocracy, Orthodoxy, nationality’, and which in its present form defines acts that are perceived as critiquing religion or the Church as ‘anti-state’ and ‘anti-Russian’, and also as ‘anti-Orthodox’, ‘blasphemy’, ‘inciting religious hatred’, ‘insulting believers’ and ‘diminishing the spiritual foundations of the state’. In the case study of ‘crime and punishment’ related to the ‘Pussy Riot affair’, Schroeder and Karpov argue that the case involved broad constituencies both within and outside Orthodoxy, clear signs of disunity among the Orthodox, and ‘the obvious politicisation of the act, which involved both the establishment and the opposition political forces’. Finally, the authors explain by Durkheimian functionalist theory how through the punishment of the Pussy Rioters the (new) social norm ‘is understood, made obvious to society members, and reaffirmed’, and highlight the general crystallisation of new social norms ‘imposed by Russia’s desecularisation’.

From moral, religious, political and legal points of view it does matter what in fact the five women did in Christ the Saviour Cathedral, and whether or not the punishment they have been receiving is commensurate with their deed. Yet from a theoretical-sociological point of view what matters is what they were accused
of (no matter whether rightly or wrongly, legally or not, morally or immorally, and so on) and what the punishment was. By understanding this we shall understand the nature of the new norms now being affirmed through their punishment.

Importantly, all societies and cultures have an operative consensus over the *basic* values (Demerath, 1994, pp. 112–13), which may or may not be represented by religious symbols acknowledged by all ‘full citizens’ (Ferrari, 2010, pp. 756–57). The most exceptional feature of the recent ‘Pussy Riot case’ in the Russian Federation is the fact that it does not involve confrontations between the mainstream culture and an ethnoreligious minority or recent immigrants of non-European descent. While the stimulus to protect ‘who we are’, to maintain or redefine the collective cultural identity, is almost universal, in the case of ‘Pussy Riot’ the antagonistic ‘others’ are not defined by race, socio-economic class or even religion (in the conventional sense).

Not all scholars agree with the assessment of Schroeder and Karpov that the developments in the Russian Federation are approximating the historical triad of ‘autocracy, Orthodoxy, nationality’. Particularly, Luke March argues:

> What is the most fundamental break from Tsarist ‘official nationality’ is that the view of nationality proffered is profoundly secular – Russian Orthodoxy is not part of the contemporary triad. The Church does not figure in foreign policy concepts, Presidential state of the nation addresses, or (explicitly) in the concept of sovereign democracy. In principle, the national idea is profoundly multinational and multiconfessional. This is not to deny that the Russian Orthodox Church is ‘first among equals’ in relation to Russia’s other traditional religions, both in the 1997 Law on Religions and repeated elite statements that refer to its unique role in defending Russian statehood throughout history, to a degree that may be unconstitutional. … rapprochement between church and state falls a long way short of the Tsarist ‘symphonic ideal’ of a fusion of secular and religious power, or the nationalist idea of a ‘Third Rome’ exercising its civilizing mission against the decadent West. (March, 2012, p. 410)

*Alterations in the Means of Mass Communication and Related Outcomes in the Realm of Scholarly Exchange of Ideas and Information*

The fourth aspect of the increasingly complex relations between religion and politics results from alterations in the means of mass communication and related outcomes in the realm of scholarly exchange of ideas and information. On one hand, the Cold War tools of propaganda have largely been transformed into engines generating information about Russia and the former Soviet societies. On the other hand, there has been also a quantum increase in information proliferation. Although many of the governments of the region attempt to limit the information resources of the mass media and news organisations, there is a proliferation of data of all kinds on the internet and in the global newsrooms. Public opinion agencies are able to provide results that simply did not exist before, though some of them have faced difficult relations with the authorities. Moreover, scholars themselves, having been granted a greater degree of freedom of research and investigation than before, are devoting their careers to analysing the conditions of faith and politics in these societies. Many formerly closed archives, though not all, have opened up for research, and we have learnt a great deal about the past, both more distant and more recent. In addition, as the governments have taken on obligations to respond to human rights and social justice questions, often including
some about religion, human rights officers at parliament or in related government agencies can now provide quite a bit of information that was previously hidden. For their part, most religious groups have lively web presences that can be mined for data to use in analyses. Googling the name of virtually any religious group will lead one to the official website and, often, various ancillary sites for specific purposes such as religious charities or educational programmes. There is also a wealth of information available from such observer websites as Moscow’s SOVA Center or Transitions Online (TOL), the latter derived from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Some previously nearly dormant religious institutions now have a wide range of activities that can be examined. Most information about religious groups is available freely, if not always easily accessible. However, as religious bureaucracies have been reconstituted, so the examination of those bureaucracies has sometimes become extremely daunting. Investigations are often thwarted by the self-protective practices of bureaucracies as much as by some genuine importance attached to secrecy. Information about the import business involvements of the Moscow Patriarchate in the 1990s or the controversy about the enterprises that are centred at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow are examples of cases where the ROC has intentionally been reticent.

‘Authorities Differ’, Theories Change and Conceptualisations Clash in this Complex Setting

The abovementioned processes have resulted in a situation less prone to promoting agreement among experts because of the greater complexity of phenomena and variations in the type of intellectual approach one brings to issues, and which is subject to a new range of theoretical and conceptual approaches that either were not applied during the Soviet period or have been developed since the end of that period.

Given the quality and the quantity of information available on religion and politics in Russia and the CIS, it is no wonder that the number of points of view has also proliferated. Disciplinary differences and one’s own history of scholarship and of interest shape differences in subject matter and the way it is framed. For example, the impact of an academic discipline can be observed in the details of method and approach. In his article in this issue, the political scientist Alar Kilp frames his analysis in terms of electoral processes, while Schroeder and Karpov, viewing a very similar phenomenon – manipulating religious symbols and contents in order to strengthen national identity and influence political loyalty vis-à-vis the political opposition – frame their analysis in terms of long-term development largely autonomous from specifics of electoral processes.

Is the Revival of Russian Orthodoxy a General or a Selective Phenomenon?

In a broader picture, scholars tend to agree that in some form or another, Russian Orthodoxy has been revivified in Russian society, culture or politics. They do not agree, however, whether this is a general phenomenon or whether this assessment is valid for selected spheres and specific dimensions of social and political life. For example, John and Carol Garrard have argued on a general level that since the collapse of communism the ROC has been filling the vacuum once occupied by ‘scientific atheism’, reconstituting a national belief system in its own image, and that in general ‘believers are replacing party members’ (Garrard and Garrard, 2008, p. ix). If they are correct, then the ROC appears to fulfill this function in a linearly progressive way. The rise of the ROC in Russian public life was observed in the 1990s (Bourdeaux, 2000) as well as in the first decade of the twenty-first century (Garrard and Garrard, 2008). Looking at particular dimensions of political life, analysts agree more over the significant role and influence of the ROC in foreign policy and

In his article in this issue, Vyacheslav Karpov observes that since the mid-1990s it has been the interest of Russian secular elites to promote the idea of ‘spiritual security’ (see Payne, 2010; Marsh, 2012), which has meant a reliance on Russia’s traditional faiths and their protection against religious competitors from abroad. Correspondingly, in Russian domestic politics, the first crucial and oft-cited ‘turning point’ in the rise of the political influence of the ROC occurred with the passage of the 1997 law regulating church–state relations (Fagan, 2013, pp. 62–68). Typically, scholars do not dispute John Anderson’s (2007) generalised observation that the Russian president has been the dominant partner in the asymmetrical church–state relationships in Russia. Recently Irina Papkova (2011a) has questioned the evaluation of the ROC as a powerful political actor and has considered the political influence of the ROC as exaggerated at least for the period before the arrival of President Medvedev in 2008 and of Patriarch Kirill in 2009 (Burgess, 2009, p. 33; Filatov, 2010, p. 28; Papkova, 2011b). She explains ‘the sudden acceleration of the ROC’s successes in lobbying the state’ by ‘the simultaneous changeover in leadership in both the patriarchate and the presidency’ (Papkova, 2011b, p. 676). The enthronement of Kirill in February 2009 has changed the political status, motivation and ambitions of the ROC and, correspondingly, has also affected the relationship between the Russian state and the majority national church (Papkova and Gorenburg, 2011, p. 3). In specific dimensions, the rapprochement of church (or ‘traditional religions’) and state has proceeded with varying speed and efficiency. For example, only in September 2012 were classes on ‘traditional faiths’ introduced in state schools. Children were allowed to choose between courses on Orthodoxy, world religions, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and the ‘basis of secular ethics’. Such a belated change in state policy on religious education can hardly be considered a major achievement for the ROC. While Papkova’s recent scholarship calls for caution in assessments, Karpov (in this issue) argues that during the last two decades there have been ‘spectacular public displays of the political role of religion’, and ‘an impressive return of religion to the public arena.’ Furthermore, for Karpov, the resurgence of this kind of religion has been closely associated with the spread of nationalistic, undemocratic and intolerant ideologies, and has not been manifested in a parallel rise of religious piety, religious practices and beliefs in Russian society.

How much Depends on Personalities?

The scholars of religion in Russian politics differ also in the extent to which their explanations of developments focus on personalities filling the offices of church and state leadership. In her opinion piece in this issue, Irina Papkova lays a particular emphasis on the scholarly value of due consideration of the role of such personalities and on the patterns of their mutual relations. She admits that the advent of the era of ‘Medvedev and Kirill’ stimulated her to review her previous scholarly arguments about (the politically weak) ROC in Russia. She elaborates this point on the basis of the latest developments and argues that ‘had [Metropolitan] Kliment won [the election for patriarch in 2009] (and he could have) there is little doubt the present day political position of the ROC would have been noticeably weaker’; and, on the political side, ‘the instant you have a president and/or prime minister in power whose personal preferences happen to be deeply secularist (something that in the Russian context is entirely possible) the whole picture could radically
change’. Thus, while specific empirical developments may require urgent revisions of scholarly assessments, Papkova reminds us that in the study of the church institution ‘we should always treat our object of analysis as a multivocal institution, full of competing ideas and, perhaps even more importantly, competing personalities with vested interests in advancing their ideological perspectives’.

Discourses of Identity

Scholarly puzzles seem to multiply most in the field of research that focuses on religion in the discourses of identity. As scholars of religion, we may be tempted to prefer cosmopolitan (or methodologically anti-national) theories over essentialistic (cultural or civilisational) ones. Irrespective of our scholarly aversions, cultural identities nevertheless continue to be constructed in ‘essentialistic’ terms mostly by the political and religious leadership of the cultural and political communities, who in some form or another always communicate with the masses via symbols of identity, memory and tradition. The theories that tend to essentialise religious identities therefore certainly constitute a valid object of scholarly study. While Irina Papkova seems to be highly reserved about the academic utility of theories such as ‘clash of civilizations’ (Huntington, 1993) and ‘multiple modernities’ (Eisenstadt, 2000), several scholars have recently employed the ‘multiple modernities’ approach in assessing the patterns of European church–state relations (Katzenstein and Byrnes, 2006; Makrides, 2009; Spohn, 2009; Rosati and Stoeckl, 2012). Some have sought for a distinctively Orthodox pattern of church–state relations (Naletova, 2009; Leustean, 2011); others have argued against too simple theses of symphony and caesaropapism, and even the common assumption about ‘Orthodoxy as a triad of church, state and nation’ (Kalkandjieva, 2011, p. 613).

Evolution in the Superstructure of Scholarship; ‘Desecularisation’

As the post-Soviet world has evolved over the last 25 years, so has the superstructure of scholarship related to it. There are many new theoretical approaches to politics and to religion that make the study of these areas less and less integrated. Postmodern thinking and various interpretive approaches have problematised power and authority in the social sciences as never before. Market (or supply-side) models have also arisen to challenge older functionalist approaches, which, nevertheless, retain a great deal of vitality. There is also the ‘cultural turn’ that has brought ethnographic or anthropological approaches into greater favour than before. In these circumstances, there is greater and greater pressure to define oneself and self-consciously to apply methods that can be explained to others.

Most notably, the paradigm of ‘desecularisation’ has come to the fore. Scholars have argued that in the Russian Federation the processes of desecularisation have occurred mainly in the realms of state regulation of religion (Sebentsov, 2011) and in the foreign policy and national security realm, where Orthodoxy has been reasserted mostly as a symbol (Marsh, 2011, pp. 259–61). Vyacheslav Karpov has developed a conceptual framework for desecularisation (Karpov, 2010) and employed it in an analysis of the desecularisation of Russia’s state schools (Lisovskaya and Karpov, 2010). In his article in this issue, Karpov not only distinguishes ‘desecularisation from above’ from ‘desecularisation from below’, but also sees an inverse law-like relationship between the two. The success of the Russian desecularising regime is one of the main obstacles to a religious revival from below: ‘logically derived from the model are predictions of the current desecularising regime’s imminent collapse to be followed by a new phase of desecularisation from below’. Karpov argues that Russia has witnessed two decades of ‘desecularisation from above’ which is promoted by religious and
secular elites and which is instrumental in control and suppression of pluralism both between religions and within religious institutions.

Karpov in particular, but also other contributors in this issue, do not solve or end the scholarly disagreements and debates over these issues, but help to clarify where, when and to what extent the ROC has enjoyed genuine ‘success’ or ‘rising influence’ in the public sphere and national politics. Or is it simply the rising use of religious symbolism by an increasingly authoritarian government that we see? Answering this question requires us to take into account not only the multivocal character of religious and secular institutions and actors, but also to hear the voices arising from forms of cultural Christianity such as ‘Orthodoxy’.

Various Understandings of the Concept ‘Orthodoxy’

There are three ways in which the authors in this issue have used the concept ‘Orthodoxy’ in their analyses.

First, they distinguish different types of Orthodoxy fulfilling different functions in the public sphere. In one way or another all the papers in this issue deal with ‘Orthodoxy’, but depending on the type of religion and its related cultural and political functions, the phrase ‘Russian Orthodoxy’ is referred to as the religious institution, as the national religion, as a symbol of ethnic or national cultural identity, or as a symbol of political culture which unites all ‘full members’ of the political community.

Second, some of the papers also identify instances where different forms of Orthodoxy have been in conflict with each other. Thus Papkova reminds us of the refusal of the Moscow Patriarchate to absorb the Abkhazian Orthodox parishes after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, where the Orthodoxy of the patriarch(s) (which can be seen as ‘Orthodoxy as a religious institution’) refused to give in to the pressure coming from the regime (which acted in conformity with ‘Orthodoxy as a symbol of a political culture’). The study by Schroeder and Karpov highlights instances where Orthodoxy may virtually be identified and fused with ‘the state’, ‘the regime’, and ‘political loyalty’, and in this function may deny the Orthodoxy of those who are critical of this fusion. Papkova particularly suggests that ‘we may wish to avoid essentialising the opposition as secular and the regime as supported by a rigid Orthodoxy’, because anti-Putin opposition in Russia includes alongside secularists also ultranationalist Orthodox and liberal Orthodox. Similarly, to make the task of the analyst even more complex, Schroeder and Karpov argue that in the Pussy Riot case ‘the conflict fault lines have now cut across the churched and unchurched, Orthodox and non-Orthodox populations and orientations’.

Third, ‘multiple’ and often ‘competing’ forms of Orthodoxy can also be approached by focusing on the public roles that religion fulfils institutionally, formally or symbolically. The contributors to this issue have observed that there is often not an agreement over the public roles, forms and presence of Orthodoxy. Additionally, any changes in the public forms and functions of Orthodoxy can be accompanied by such social tensions and conflicts, where both religious and secular actors are divided and therefore active on both sides as a result of different preferences for the public presence of Orthodoxy.

Russia in Comparative Perspective: Eastern-Central Europe, Western Europe and the CIS

Religion–state relations in the Russian Federation are approached from three comparative perspectives in this issue: (1) comparison of the Russian Federation with other Orthodox and non-Orthodox countries of the postcommunist region of Europe; (2) comparison of
Eastern-Central European countries with Western Europe; (3) the status and role of the Russian Federation within the countries of the CIS.

Comparison of the Russian Federation with Other Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Countries of the Postcommunist Region of Europe

In the last few years an unprecedented new interrelationship has been developing between Orthodoxy and Western European faith systems. Almost a decade ago, Peter Berger (2005) observed that the Eurosecularity that is characteristic of Western and Central Europe is a geographical exception in an otherwise ‘furiously religious’ modern world (Berger, 2008, p. 24), and he argued that the accession of Eastern-Central European countries to the European Union (2004–2007) would result in (further) secularisation of these societies, because of the predominant ‘Eurosecularity’ that characterises Western and Central Europe: ‘Countries are pulled into secularity to the degree by which they are integrated into Europe. Integration into Europe means signing on to Eurosecularity (the legal norms, after all, are contained in the famous EU acquis) along with the rest of the “Europe package”’ (Berger, 2005, p. 113). While Berger’s hypothesis was aimed mostly at Poland and the Orthodox countries, and not particularly at Estonia, which was already significantly secularised before its accession to the EU, the Estonian case, as shown by Alar Kilp in his article in this issue, provides contrary evidence. Kilp highlights the need for due focus on several ‘political’ variables related to the church–state relationship. He argues that since accession to the EU in 2004 there has been (1) a shift towards desecularisation in the dimension of collective cultural identities, (2) increasing sacralisation of ethnic identities in Estonian electoral campaigns accompanied by use of religious objects, and (3) a new use of institutions and ceremonies as symbolic representations of cultural identity. Kilp classifies this process as a small ‘shift’ towards desecularisation, because in it the ethnic and national passions ‘find their outlet in religious symbols, services and buildings’, and it has not ‘spilled over’ and affected the highly secular nature of Estonian culture and other dimensions of politics. Similarly, Kilp claims that the desecularisation of cultural identities in electoral campaigns for the Estonian parliament is not about ‘believing’, ‘behaving’ and ‘belonging’ in a traditional religious sense. Against this background, ‘religious resurgence’ and ‘desecularisation’ are hardly reserved only for the Russian Federation. Are these processes characteristic of all or most traditional churches in the postcommunist region of Europe?

Kilp focuses particularly on the political dimensions of ‘religion in Estonian politics’, where the churches (both Lutheran and Orthodox) are in a significantly weaker position culturally than the ROC is in the Russian Federation. There are also, however, functional similarities: Russian Orthodoxy represents the spiritual values of the cultural tradition in the Russian Federation quite similarly to the way public Lutheranism operates in the Estonian national community. Kilp emphasises that the reconstruction of collective identities and their relationship to religious tradition and institution is a wider trend in postcommunist societies, which within specific national and cultural contexts vary in substance and degree, but belong to the same category. In the Estonian case, the ‘predominance’ of the political is manifested in the scheduling of religious services, both Lutheran and Orthodox, at the culmination of the electoral campaign, in the instrumental use of religious buildings as symbols by competing political elites, and in the politicisation of cultural religious identities mostly by political actors. Kilp concludes with the argument that such use of religious services at the culmination phase of the electoral campaign fulfilled ‘the function of exclusion by drawing the symbolic boundaries between national government and opposition, between the Estonian cultural mainstream and the Russophone minority culture’.
Comparison of Eastern-Central European Countries with Western Europe

Outside the territory of the Russian Federation, Orthodoxy also functions as a symbol of minority identity and as the representative of the cultural community of tens of millions of ethnic Russians (and Russophone minorities who are not ethnically Russians) living in the Russian ‘near abroad’ and in member-states of the European Union (EU). The inclusion into the EU of predominantly Orthodox countries (Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria alongside Greece, a long-time member) and countries with significant Orthodox (and Russophone) populations (Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia) has not occurred without drawing the attention of the ROC and its hierarchy. Already in 2004, Bishop Hilarion (who at that time was serving as bishop of Vienna and Austria) argued that Orthodoxy was no longer outside the EU:

All of this will strengthen the position of Orthodoxy in the EU and will significantly increase the possibilities of Orthodox testimony in the New Europe. After these countries join the European Union the number of Orthodox communities existing in EU territory will number among the tens of thousands and the number of believers in the tens of millions. (Hilarion, 2004, p. 23)

The geographical dispersion of millions of Orthodox believers, however, does not automatically result in unity of Orthodox identity, belief and view of the world. Intra-Orthodox and Catholic-Orthodox relationships are almost as multifaceted and complex as are the church–state relations in both domestic and international dimensions. Inter- and intra-denominational relations involve aspects of common interest, potentials for collaboration, obstacles and consequences, and practices of mutual relations (Payne and Kent, 2011).

We thus observe that there are similarities and connections between public religion inside the Russian Federation and in its neighbouring countries. But how does Russia position itself comparatively according to its levels of social religiosity (by religious practice and belief)? Hardly anyone would disagree that Orthodoxy in Russia is more visible and functional in Russian politics than Calvinism or Catholicism in the contemporary Netherlands, but when religious attendance was surveyed in 36 European societies by the World Values Survey in 1999/2000, the societies with the highest percentages of people attending religious services ‘never or practically never’ were France (60.4), the Czech Republic (57.5), Great Britain (55.8) and the Russian Federation (50.1) (WVS, 2012).

For establishing the status of the influence of the religious institution in the public sphere, the social pattern of attachment to institutional religious practices is therefore quite obviously of secondary importance, and vice versa: the reason why scholars of religion concentrate on ‘religion and politics’ in the Russian Federation more than they do for studying most other countries in postcommunist Europe (with the possible exceptions of Romania and Poland) is not to be found in the levels of religious practice or affiliation in Russian society. The level of religious affiliation (self-identification) is low not only in the Russian Federation, but in the postcommunist region in general. Out of seven countries with the lowest percentage levels of religious affiliation in the sample of the World Values Survey 1999/2000, six (!) were from the postcommunist region: Hungary (57.1), Ukraine (56.4), Belarus’ (52.2), the Russian Federation (50.5), the Netherlands (44.8), the Czech Republic (33.7) and Estonia (24.8).

Scholars who study religion in public life in the Russian Federation and in postcommunist countries face a dilemma. On the one hand, it is a truism that the Soviet Union (and other communist states of Eastern-Central Europe) were incapable of stamping out religion (including the Orthodox Church). On the other hand, however, it is also common knowledge
that religion in Western European secularised societies has been deinstitutionalised and privatised and has almost lost its public roles. Comparative scholarship needs to find proper labels and universal scales for situations where the ethnicisation of religion (in Eastern European societies) tends to replace the religious choice of an individual with the religion of birth, and for other situations where involuntary church affiliation continues to be the norm. Should we sound the alarm when religion becomes ‘ethnicised’ in the Russian Federation, while in traditionally Catholic–Protestant Germany most religious affiliations still result from ‘involuntary’ infant baptisms (Moltmann, 1986, p. 112)? Additionally, if one distinguishes between different types of political nationalisms, and classifies Putin’s regime as ‘great power-imperial nationalism’ (Kuzio, 2010, pp. 285, 287), then ‘Russian nationalism’ (at least in its domestic dimension) will be more atypical of the postcommunist region than it is of the historic and present ‘superpowers’ of the western world. One can hardly consider the policy preference of four ‘traditional religions’ in the Russian Federation as exceptional, or in violation of the international norms of ‘equal treatment of religions’ (religious neutrality of the state), when the cultural dominance of a single denomination continues to be a norm in Europe and most European societies are confessionally homogeneous. John Madeley found in a recent comparative study that out of 46 European societies, in 38 the majority of the population, in 33 two-thirds of the population and in 13 more than 90 per cent of the population belonged to one confession (Madeley, 2009, p. 277).

Subjective experiences in Lebanese society have led Irina Papkova to see that themes she had studied in the Russian context ‘could be related to a broader universe of inquiry’. In her article in this issue she notes that ‘it just so happens that chronologically, the appearance of an increasingly militant secularist movement in Lebanon coincides very neatly with the activisation of an anti-clerical mood among some particularly active portions of Russian civil society; it also coincides with a similar phenomenon in Europe and the United States’.

It is far from self-evident how one should turn this observation into a comparative study with a proper research design, when the meaning of secularism (and its contrasting ‘political religion’) and anticlericalism not only result from socio-historical and cultural particularities, but are dynamically changing. Thus the scholar faces the task of tracing the (local) political power struggles that define what religion (and secularism) and their proper functions in the public sphere are. Also needing attention are the discourses which are able to shift the meanings of secularism and publicly acknowledged forms of religion, and the dynamics of the boundary shifts between the two.

The Status and Role of the Russian Federation within the Countries of the CIS

The article by Alicja Curanović in this issue offers a comparative study of church–state relations in the Russian Federation and in post-Soviet Orthodox-dominated states (Belarus’, Moldova) and Muslim states (Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan). Among these countries, Curanović observes ‘a set of patterned relations between the state and religious institutions’, which she labels ‘the post-Soviet religious model’. The model of church–state relations that has been replicated throughout the CIS area has three characteristic features: the principle of the secular state; the state-recognised category of ‘traditional’ religions; and the state-given ‘licence to preach’. According to this pattern, the states do not support the rise of religion in society, but do support the role of religion in social integration and political legitimisation. The ‘post-Soviet model’ functions via social partnership (rapprochement of the state and traditional religions in internal social relations, including the political protection of religious traditions versus non-traditional forms of religion) and via religious diplomacy (in external relations). Closely related to the ‘post-Soviet model’ are the
mutually acknowledged ‘ethnicised’ religious identities among the ‘traditional religions’, which avoid proselytism outside their own ethno-religious communities.

The argument by Curanović differs from that in comparative studies seeking for a common or most characteristic pattern of church–state relations within the Eastern Orthodox realm (Roudometof et al., 2005; Kalkandjieva, 2011). In her article in this issue Papkova suggests that there is a fertile uncultivated ground for systematic comparison of the Russian situation with situations in other post-Soviet Orthodox states, and of the political claims put forward by local Orthodox Churches which can advance scholarly knowledge ‘of the nature of the modern Orthodox Church’s theology of the state’.

The ‘post-Soviet model’ presented by Curanović, however, does partially overlap with comprehensive models (which aim at including all major dimensions and levels of church–state relations) used in the study of Western European church–state relations. For example, Western European patterns of church–state relations typically include (at least) two levels of state recognition of religious organisations, where the highest ‘tier’ (equivalent to ‘traditional religions’ in the model presented by Curanović) is reserved to religious traditions that are peculiar to the region, dominant in the religious sphere, historical, or simply numerically largest (Madeley, 2009, p. 278).

The extension of the comparative sample to all (traditionally Christian) postcommunist societies would yield significant variations in the legacies of communist periods, in confessional markets, and in the relationship between religious traditions and national identity. In this sample, the postcommunist pattern would be represented by those societies where culture is monoconfessional, where national identity is closely connected to religious tradition, and where the religious tradition is the sole representative of religion in the public sphere. This ‘ideal type’ is presumably best approximated by Catholic Poland and Orthodox Romania, but not the Russian Federation, which is not as close to a monoconfessional culture nor to a single representation of religion in the public sphere. One of the most recent studies on religious policy in Russia argues that Russia remains torn between alternatives: the question of whether it will be an Orthodox country with religious minorities or a multiconfessional state is destabilising the nation (Fagan, 2013).

One of the main virtues of the ‘post-Soviet model’ advanced by Curanović is its due acknowledgment of the geopolitical status of the Russian Federation and the transnational role of the ROC. Conventionally, in order to provide universally comparable data, cross-national studies are expected to compare countries against a common and universally applicable set of variables (see Fox, 2008). The model suggested and pattern identified by Curanović deviates from this convention by combining national variables with others that are transnational (the ROC as transnational actor), international and geopolitical (‘the Russian factor’). Thus her ‘Russia sets the trend’-style argument should not be read as if the Russian Federation were the ‘most typical’ empirical referent for a specific comparative pattern of church–state relations, the state regulation of the religious field, or the intensity of religious influence in public life. Instead, ‘Russia sets the trend’ is a pattern that combines national, transnational, international and geopolitical dimensions; the research strategy chosen by Curanović helps to make sense of the ‘post-Soviet’ (that is, regional) pattern at the expense of the fact that at least part of the findings may not be comparable outside the region. Her contribution is to an area study rather than to conventional cross-national comparison.

Last, but not least, we should note that the sample of comparative cases given by Curanović does not include non-Orthodox post-Soviet countries (such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and postcommunist Orthodox countries which have more successfully democratised than any of the countries included in her sample (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine). If a comparative sample of countries included countries in the categories of
‘full’ or ‘flawed’ democracies (Economist, 2011), it would result in an altered common (post-Soviet or postcommunist) model of church–state relations. As out of 12 non-Baltic former Soviet Republics, only Ukraine ‘has achieved demonstrable democratic progress over the course of the new decade’ (Walker, 2009, pp. 74, 77), it may be that patterns of church–state relations (and their legal and extralegal dimensions) are more influenced by the types of political regime. Consequently, analytically useful research designs do not exclude the possibility that the pattern of the present political regime may have stronger impact on church–state relations than variables such as political and socio-historic legacy, confession and religious diversity.

Conclusions

Considering the enormous research field of ‘religion in the politics and culture of the Russian Federation and its near abroad’, we know that one collection of five papers cannot deal with the field comprehensively even if only core themes are selected, but we know that knowledge improves by specialisation, and specialisation requires fragmentation into committed groups of experts devoted to a narrow sphere of expertise. We are confident that the five papers in this issue, each presenting a focused and fine-grained analysis, will advance our knowledge in selected aspects and dimensions of their studies, and that in combination they will also offer an inter- and cross-disciplinary exchange of scholarship.

Acknowledgments

Earlier versions of the articles in this special issue were presented at the international workshop ‘Religion, Politics and Policy-Making in Russia: Domestic and International Dimensions’ organised by the Centre for EU-Russia Studies (CEURUS) at the University of Tartu, Estonia, 6–7 June 2012. The editors of this issue are grateful to CEURUS for sponsoring the workshop, to Piret Ehin, CEURUS director, to Siiri Maimets, Varje Kuut, and Britt Ressar for efficient administration of the workshop, and to all who submitted papers to this volume. We are also grateful to Alexander Agadjanian, Kaarina Aitamurto, Jelena Avanesova, Elina Kahla, Igor’ Kotin, Christopher Marsh, Victor Shnirelman, Marat Shterin, Meagan Todd and Aleksandr Verkhovsky, whose participation at the workshop greatly contributed to bringing this collective effort to completion. Jerry Pankhurst’s participation in the workshop and its preparation, and subsequent work on preparation of this introductory essay, took place while he was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Tartu in spring semester 2012. Finally, we are extremely grateful for the patient support, strong reviewing and clear editing of the contributions by Philip Walters and the anonymous reviewers. We deeply appreciate the opportunity to publish selected papers from the 2012 Tartu workshop in this issue of Religion, State & Society.

JERRY G. PANKHURST
ALAR KILP

Notes on Contributors

Jerry Pankhurst is a professor and chair of the Department of Sociology and director of the programme in Russian and Central Eurasian Studies at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, USA. He has pursued a long-term interest in the sociology of Russia and the post-Soviet realm, with growing focus on the broader European context. He has co-edited scholarly collections on Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age (AltaMira/Rowman and
Littlefield, 2005) and Family, Religion and Social Change in Diverse Societies (Oxford University Press, 2000), as well as two volumes on the sociology of Soviet society. His articles have appeared in Journal of Church and State, Journal of Family Issues, Sociological Inquiry and numerous edited collections. Email: jpankhurst@wittenberg.edu.

Alar Kilp is a lecturer in comparative politics at the University of Tartu, Estonia. In 2012 he defended his doctoral thesis Church Authority in Society, Culture and Politics after Communism at the University of Tartu. His academic research deals with religion and politics, secularisation and church–state relations in postcommunist Europe. He has co-edited the volumes Extremism Within and Around Us (Tartu University Press, 2011) and Religion and Politics in Multicultural Europe (Tartu University Press, 2009). He has published articles in Kultura i Polityka, Forschungen zur Anthropolgie und Religiongeschichte (Ugarit Verlag), Studies in Church History (Annuals of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science) and Proceedings of the Estonian National Defence College. Email: alar.kilp@ut.ee.

References

Editorial Introduction


Papkova, I. (2011a) The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics (Washington, DC, Woodrow Wilson Center Press).


